

Up Go the Rubles

No outsider can know precisely what is in the Soviet defense budget, but it is clear that the 5 per cent increase for 1966 just announced is a political signal—to the United States and to the Soviet people. A year ago, when the budget was reduced with some fanfare, there was reason to believe that the Soviet leaders expected the United States to withdraw from Vietnam if they helped it to save face. Now they have been disabused—and disillusioned.

In that sense the increase represents a more realistic appreciation of American intentions. No doubt it reflects some of the actual cost of aiding North Vietnam. Since American military expenditures also are mounting, this newest move can scarcely be considered in itself a hardening of the line. But inevitably such actions influence counteractions. The principal meaning to the United States is that the Soviet Union does not look for an early end to the conflict.

To the Soviet people the budget increase will have an additional meaning beyond warning them not to anticipate any accommodation with this country. It also is a plain indication that they must

not look for more consumer goods in the next year. Completely apart from the other significance of the budget emphasis, this must be cause for regret in the West and the Soviet Union alike.